

Behind Enemy Lines

By: Rian Moeru

After the beasts known as Predacons appeared all across the earth, followed by humanoid robots, human-controlled mecha's were created. Jack is the youngest pilot in history, trained since he was eight to fight. But he's about to learn the truth about these enemies... AU! No pairings! Some influence from Pacific Rim! Co-authored between me and my best bud ToaXabineh! Permanent hiatus

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Behind Enemy Lines

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Chapter 1

Rian: Hello everyone! How's it going? This is a new fic written on a whim between me and Toa. It takes elements of Pacific Rim (Stupid awesome movie), and melds them into the Transformers Prime verse. Obviously there's going to be some differences because we want an original idea!

Some key differences would be that humans, who usually have backwater technology compared to Cybertronians, will be quite advanced in this fic, technology wise, and not nearly as easy to kill as they otherwise would be! And... well, I'd tell you more, but that would be spoiling I think. Any who, if you guys like it, we'll write more! Take it away Toa!

Toxabineh: Also, another change in this story that Rian forgot to mention is that the 'cons won't be completely and totally evil. They aren't by any means good and do awful things, but there are certain boundaries they are not willing to cross, as you'll see later on!

Rian: Also, suggestions and ideas are welcomed! Especially names for the various mechas! We suck at coming up with names x.x

Disclaimer: Neither of us own anything!

Enjoy!

If Jack was asked to remember a time when he hadn't been in training as a mecha pilot, he would be hard pressed. He'd come to the military base quite awhile ago, back when he was eight, in fact. He could faintly remember, one day during class in elementary school, a couple of tall military men in casual clothing had come to his school to run a test on all of the kids. It wasn't all that weird, the same test happened all the time, though usually at high schools or colleges. It had been that way for about twenty years, ever since the

Predacon attacks had started to intensify with the growing threat they posed to humanity and when the mecha pilot program had started.

Jack could somewhat recall his name being called, and being led into an empty classroom. He'd been helped up into a chair by a nice man named Lennox, and was hooked up to a weird machine. He could sort of remember how he'd idly swung his legs and hummed to himself as the device was started up, not minding the fuzzy, static feeling that the machine sent through him. He'd thought the sensation quite nice, actually.

Jack could very clearly remember, though, the stunned expressions of the two men who were running the test on him as they'd looked over the test results.

Other than that though, most of his life before the militia base was a blur. He couldn't remember his old house, or the tiny town he'd lived in. Jack knew that if he hadn't been granted the weekly visits he had with his mom, he would've forgotten her face, too.

He had made few friends in the years he spent living in the base, one of many places where Mecha's could be safely stored. Recently a small boy, no older than twelve, had been brought in for tech support, a genius in the field despite his age and a girl named Miko, who had recently been brought in due her compatibility, though he wasn't certain if she would actually ever pilot. Miko was... overzealous at times. Most likely she'd be a reserve. Jack wasn't even sure if she was receiving much training to be a pilot.

Most of the others, though, disliked him. It wasn't a secret, it was a fact. He was the youngest official pilot here, and was favored by the director of the program. He got the best gear, the best training, the best mecha, labeled the Wayward Rook, was one of the latest models available. Agile and powerful, it had proven to be more than a match for any of the Predacons Jack had faced thus far. He'd often been praised for his work by his officers, and received his fair share of nasty looks from other pilots. Still, he didn't care what anyone really thought. He kept to himself, mostly, finding it better that way than to make bonds with those who could die the next day.

At times he felt more like a robot to them than he did a person. They certainly didn't look at him like he was a normal human being on the rare occasion that he interacted with them. It made him grateful for some of the benefits to being the favorite on the base, such as being allowed to take meals to his room so that the others didn't disturb him, as meal times were one of the few times he got to relax during his intensive training regime.

Jack jumped, drawn from his thoughts when there was a knock at his door.

"Hey kid, you awake?" A voice called in. Jack grinned, recognizing who it was immediately.

"Yeah. The door's open so come on in." He called back. Will Lennox entered the room.

Will was one of the people on base that didn't scorn him for being talented. He was a kind man, and had only ever been friendly to Jack. He had not only been one of the men who'd run the test on him eight years ago, but had also been one of his first trainers during his younger years, due to the man's ability to get along with children.

"Sorry to cut in on your relaxation time, kid, but we have a recon mission in an hour. I thought you'd want a chance to go prep your mecha before we have to go." Lennox stated, crossing his arms.

Jack perked up, curious.

"Has there been a Predacon sighting?" He asked curiously. "Or those other robots, the humanoid ones?"

While it had been about twenty years ago that the Predacons had first begun attacking, the humanoid versions of the robotic aliens had first arrived on Earth only five years ago- though some wondered if they were aliens at all, considering how similar they were to Predacons in characteristic and their mechas in shapes. As if they didn't have enough troubles already.

Jack had killed his share of these humanoid-formed robots, as well

as Predacons. All too often both were drawn to the energon mines, their power source for the Mechas and had to be stopped before they overtook it. Unlike most Predacons, the newcomers appeared to be sentient, capable of forming plans of attack and strategic position. Too often did he hear of a comrade falling to one of those monsters.

"No, but there's a new mine that we're being sent to scout. Never know what's in there." Lennox replied cheerfully. "C'mon kid, up and at 'em!"

"Alright alright, at least give me a chance to suit up." Jack chuckled as he stood, lightly nudging Lennox in the arm when he passed the man. "How's the family going Will?" The man turned his back to Jack so as to give him privacy while he changed, smiling to himself as he thought of his family.

"I swear, Annabelle has grown two inches this past week. I can't believe she's almost two."

"Kids do grow up pretty fast." Jack grinned, placing the spine strap carefully onto the suit. "And Sarah? Talk to her recently?"

"She says if I pull another stunt like I did a few weeks ago in that collapsing mine, she's going to kill me, but otherwise she's just fine."

"Told you she'd be mad..." Jack reminded Will, grinning at the man's misfortune.

"It was that or let the miners die." Lennox stated stubbornly.

"Speaking of which, the miners haven't been sent to work at the recon site yet have they?" It was uncommon for them not to be, as the higher ups were always eager for more fuel, regardless of the possible dangers that could lie within.

"Not yet. We're being sent ahead to make sure it's stable, since some early scans showed a possibility of it being unstable. You done changing?"

"Yeah, you can turn around now." Jack said as he finished with the black suit and, for a moment, felt like the entire world was on his

shoulders. He felt much older than he actually was, and it showed through his eyes.

Lennox took hold of his shoulder, and Jack felt the burden lift, if only enough that he could breathe.

"It doesn't end, does it?" Jack asked his long time comrade, voice barely above a whisper.

Lennox grimaced.

"It'll get better, kid. I'm sure of it."

Jack didn't really believe him.

The two headed to the hangar where all of the mecha were stored in relative silence. Upon reaching the cavernous room, Jack quickly got to work, running a few diagnostics on his mecha to ensure it was battle ready. After eight years of this, Jack needed no more than twenty minutes to finish the scans.

"Everything looks in order..." He said, checking motor relays, running neural diagnostics, and checking for anything that could possibly damage the hydraulics.

In the presence of his mecha, Jack admittedly felt better. The mechs was like an old friend, as silly as it sounded. Though he tired of the fighting, he could never tire of piloting the mecha. It was an exhilarating, life-changing experience that left Jack craving for more. A sigh left Jack as the moment of truth was upon him, flashing Lennox a lazy smile. "Guess we better suit up then hm?" He said as he pressed a button to have the platform bring him to the Mehca, Will doing the same.

"It shouldn't take too long." Lennox reassured.

"I hope not." Jack grumbled. "I've got intensive training tomorrow, I was hoping to get some sleep today..."

Lennox frowned.

"Again? I've told them they need to pull back on your training

schedule, those little..."

"They're all about 'Defenders of humanity' and that whatnot Will, you should know by now that they're not going to let up." Jack mentioned without much emotion. This placed had drained too much for him to ever get worked over something as simple as extra training.

Will grimaced.

"They need to realize that just because you're a 'prodigy', that doesn't mean they should force so much on you."

"You've been telling them that for years now, and how much good has it done?" The teens tone was bitter, an underlying tone of hate in his voice that Will didn't miss as he opened the chest of his mech, scrambling in before Will even had a chance to respond. Jack quickly settled in, happy as a sense of security washed over him.

"Let's go do what we do best big guy." He said aloud, patting the inside of the chest cavity while making his way to its center. Hooking up was quick and easy for him, having done it for years now. With each new cable latching onto his suit, and into his nervous system he could start to feel his mecha coming to life. Jack flexed his fingers to make sure everything was in order, and as always the mecha responded immediately, fingers moving in the same motion.

Jack could vividly remember the first time he'd been in a mecha. It had been a week after the test at his school, and he'd been escorted to a large base. Lennox, the only one he'd been comfortable around in the base, had helped him up into a mecha. It had been a basic test model, with no weapons or fancy paint or gear, but Jack had loved it all the same. Jack remembered how he'd stared at the cables in awe as Lennox hooked him up. He could remember that first, exhilarating moment of synchronization between him and the mecha. It had been like a drug he couldn't get enough of, a constant buzz that he craved. The melding his of mind and body to machine was as natural to him as breathing, surprising the overseers with how quickly he was able to synchronize, how fluidly he could move within just a few moments of being connected to the machine.

Jack took a deep breath, reveling in the sensation of static in his

body for a moment. Time to get to work.

"This is Iron Will, checking in to base. Mecha squadron nine has reached the recon sight." Will said into his comlink as the entire squad arrived at the location via a portal, Jack to his side.

The younger pilot was within the Wayward Rook, a sleek, highly versatile mecha with a glossy black finish that had teal streaks running through the frame. It was taller than his own Iron Will, but not as bulky so as to get more speed in exchange for armor. The mecha's head turned to the right, the silvery-white visor that functioned as eyes for the pilots looking for anything out of the ordinary.

Will's own mecha slowed to a walk, the bulky machine observing carefully for anything out of the ordinary. Painted to match warfare for the mountains, it blended well with the surroundings of the cave they were currently in. He had to be mindful of his shoulder cannon, lest he accidentally caused a cave in.

"I'll scout ahead." Jack said, glancing to Lennox.

"I'll cover your rear." Will answered in turn, lights flooding the area.

Nodding, Jack's mecha moved farther into the cave, Lennox following. The others remained behind to guard the main cavern.

The entire time, both Jack and Will were silent. The tunnel was lit with an eerie glow from the energon crystals.

And then they heard the voices.

"This is the largest mine we've found in awhile." Arcee commented, helping 'Bee load a cart with energon crystals.

The scout buzzed happily, nodding eagerly as he pushed the hover cart through the bridge. This would set them up for months! Arcee looked to Optimus, noticing that he was staring at the tunnel to the

left thoughtfully with narrowed optics.

"What is it Optimus? Did you hear something?" Arcee asked, curious as to what Optimus was staring at.

"I... believe I did, but I am unsure."

"I'll go check it out." She stated, moving ahead. She was faster than the others, and smaller, allowing her opportunities to get away where larger mechs couldn't.

She moved to the entrance-

A kick to the middle sent her flying back.

"Arcee!" Optimus cried out, catching the femme as she flew into his arms. 'Bee, having already gone through the portal, was none the wiser, leaving Optimus, Arcee and Bulkhead to fend for themselves. Bulkhead transformed his hand into a mace ready to charge once the Decepticon showed it's ugly face-

But instead, a tall giant of a mecha dashed in, faster than anyone so tall should be capable of.

And Optimus recognized him immediately. He had seen this mech take down several Decepticons, and even fellow Autobots and had heard his name spoken only once- Wayward Rook. Cliffjumper had been the lastest Autobot to fall to him.

Optimus quickly charged the mecha. He didn't want to lose anymore Autobots to this mech, and so he would engage him in combat himself while Arcee and Bumblebee handled the other mech. A punch connected to his face as the mecha moved in with blazing speed, a slightly smaller, bulkier mech following in behind him to attack Bulkhead and Arcee. Optimus caught himself before he was locked in by the mecha, arm changing into a blaster and clipping his attacker in the shoulder. It didn't slow him down as he moved in again, ducking under his fist and delivering a haymaker to his head. Optimus stumbled back from the blow, causing his vision to spin. Giving him no time to recover, the mechas shoulder plates lifted to open up, showing off a set of guns that shot off streaks of lasers

directly into Optimus. The Prime rolled across the ground, hand gripping into the ground with his feet digging in to slow himself.

Optimus flicked his hand, drawing out a sword to slash the mecha's chest as he approached, uppercutting his chin. Wayward Rook skidded back into the cavern wall after a punch from Optimus, who was charging after him with his sword drawn. Recovering quickly from the blow, it flung its left hand forward, allowing a long, razor sharp chain whip to drop from its wrists. Optimus just barely managed to dodge, mentally berating himself for underestimating the mecha.

The whip blade wrapped around his sword, preventing him from bringing it down onto the mech, receiving several punches to his abdomen for his carelessness while the whip wrapped around his sword arm fought to pull his limb right out of its socket. Optimus quickly pivoted, slamming a fist violently into the mecha's chest. This seemed to send a shockwave of sorts, as the mech suddenly went rigid, a strangled gasp leaving it before it suddenly went limp.

"This is Iron Will!" The other mech with various shades of grey exclaimed, apparently calling for help through a com link, "Requesting backup to my location immediately!" A slew of rockets popped out of his forearm, exploding when they came into contact with Bulkhead.

Optimus looked unsurely at the limp mech before him. Finally, after some debate, Optimus carefully lifted the mech.

"Arcee, Bulkhead! Fall back!"

"Like hell you're taking him!" Iron Will growled out dangerously, feet spreading apart as the cannon on its shoulder glowed before sending off an incredibly powerful shot that Optimus only just managed to dodge and caused the attackers feet to dig deeply into the ground. An entire section of the wall collapsed from the force of the shot, causing the cavern to start shaking.

The bots bolted through the groundbridge, even as the other mecha yelled angrily.

"I say we offline the fragger and use his body for parts." Arcee said vehemently, glaring at where the mech was laid across a berth, unconscious.

"No, Arcee." Optimus replied sternly. "He may have valuable information."

"He's the one who killed Cliffjumper! He shouldn't even be allowed to live!" Arcee cried out, slamming her fist down angrily. "Doesn't Cliffjumper deserve to have his killer brought to justice?!"

Optimus shook his head, partially in a 'no' to the former and partially in exasperation. The femme often let personal matters get in the way of the end goal, which could end up costing them in the future.

"This is a rare and valuable opportunity Arcee." Optimus tried to explain, the femme turning her back to him in what humans called 'the cold shoulder'. "None of these mechs have ever spoken to us, and only rarely to each other. We do not even know why they attacked us when we first arrived on this world, or why they have enslaved the humans. This could be our only chance to form any semblance of peace with them, or at the very least a truce."

"But-"

A strange sound that was akin to a latch unlocking and a mechanical hissing made the bots jump, optics flying to the mech laying flat on the berth it was strapped to.

It was struggling to move, practically falling off the berth as it fought to stand. It only moved a few steps before collapsing to the ground in a heap of limbs while its free hand grasped desperately at the chest. The Autobots had their weapons out and ready, prepared to attack at the slightest hint of aggression as choking sounds could be heard emanating from him.

And then... the mechas chest cavity opened.

A tiny organic being climbed out, coughing roughly as his fingers latched onto the metal edges of the chest. His grip proved to be

flimsy and slid off with a loud, audible 'thump' on to the ground, collapsing onto his front. The child- for surely the being was young, with their tiny frame, wheezed and tried to force air into their lungs. He crawled briefly before giving up and rolling onto his back, struggling to breathe. It took several moments for Jack to regain himself, the Autobots not knowing what to do due to their extremely limited interaction with humans in general. Jack relaxed, taking deep, labored breaths, finally able to make sense enough of his surroundings to realize that this wasn't the base.

There was a pause...

"Ah crap." The boy wheezed.

Chapter 2

None one bots could move, so shocked as they were. This... was a child. A mere child..!

Said child was struggling to get onto his feet and stand, stumbling when he managed to get one foot out from under him and collapsed onto his hands. His skin was clammy and pale, slick with sweat. From the rapid movements of the chest and wheezing, it didn't take a genius to figure out he was having difficulty breathing.

Ratchet was immediately in full-on medic mode, hurrying forward to check for serious injuries.

The human scrambled back from Ratchets rescuing fingers, terror flashing through wide stormy blue eyes. This caused Ratchet to frown at him.

"Don't move! You'll irritate your injuries!" Ratchets optics widened when the boy sucked on a breath, hand shooting to his side, thankfully devoid of blood when it drew back Possible bone breakage Ratchet mused, his concern ever growing. He tried again to get near, but the boy wouldn't let him, scrambling away from his hands.

He was given a fierce scowl for his efforts, the boy reaching for a small weapon at his side.

"Enough! You're injured!"

The teen flinched away, fear flashing through expressive eyes.

"Is he wounded badly?" Optimus demanded of Ratchet, a touch of worry leaking into his words.

"I can't tell. He won't hold still!" As ratchet continued to try to catch the boy, the boy just continued to dodge. The others remained silent despite the humorous scene of Ratchet trying to capture the youth. "For the love of- come here! You need medical attention!" The teen

however gave no inclination of following Ratchet's demands. Even when he slowed, clutching his side in agony he was still trying to crawl away from Ratchet when he blacked out. The medic quickly scooped up the teen, running several scans as he cursed under his breath.

"It's as bad as I feared." The medic informed gravely.

"What was he doin' in there anyway?" Bulkhead asked, bewildered.

Ratchet didn't answer him, though he had a grave suspicion. He hoped he was wrong.

Jack stared at the door, gaze unyielding. He had been in this room for some time now, though he was unsure for how long exactly as there was no clock. He'd been thoroughly confused when he woke, finding that his wounds had been tended to. Which could mean only one thing- those *things* had touched him. Had fixed him up even! For future torture, Jack concluded grimly. Couldn't have there only source of information die off too soon could they?.

He wondered how the others were... had they gotten out safely? Was Will okay? And everyone else?

Jack jumped to his feet when the door suddenly opened. He wasn't close enough to escape without the alien mech noticing him, far on the other side of the room. Nor did he want to risk being flatten into a gooey paste by carelessly moving under its feet. So he instead remained in the corner, tense and ready to run. The mech didn't make any threatening movements, oddly enough. Instead, he simply watched Jack as he backed up, eyeing the metal being warily. The giant red and blue mech knelt down, trying to appear smaller and less intimidating.

It didn't work very well given that he was several times larger than him, comparable in size to his mecha, however, the mech offered a gentle smile.

"Hello, little one. How do you feel?" Jack pursed his lips. He wasn't

going to crack, no matter what they did! The mech frowned slightly, looking concerned when Jack said nothing. Jack stared him down, unwilling to back away. "Child, please, at least tell me if you are in pain? Our medic did what he could to heal your wounds, but we know little of humans..."

Jack waited, searching the metal face that looked over him. Then he shook his head. Relief flickered across the mech's calm face.

"Good. That is... relieving to know."

Gaze narrowed, Jack stepped back warily, certain that he was going to be grabbed at any moment now. And yet... the mech only shifted to sit down fully, gaze remaining gentle. It made him supremely uncomfortable. What did it want with him? Knowledge on how to operate his mecha maybe?

A sudden gurgling sound broke the silence, Jack's cheeks flaming when he grasped his middle.

"Are you sure you are alright?" Optimus asked, raising a brow. Jack glowered up at him, still not answering. Optimus felt the urge to slump his shoulders ever so slightly at the teens stubbornness. "Please, won't you speak to me?"

It was a useless endeavor, as Jack only continued to glare, Optimus sighing when his attempts failed to get the child to talk. There was nothing to be done if the boy didn't want to speak. "Someone will be along soon to provide you some food. I suggest you try to get some rest." He stated, standing back up. Jack let out a breath he had been holding ever since the robot had entered the room.

That had been both confusing and terrifying.

He... hadn't been hurt. And the mech had even offered him food. This wasn't what his superiors had told him would happen... What were they doing? Maybe trying to gain his trust? Well it wouldn't work, Jack thought firmly. He'd been trained for many things, to prevent him from giving information. And while this method was unorthodox, he could handle it. Forcing himself to take a deep, steadying breath, Jack sat back down.

He needed to fix his mecha. The sooner he was able to the quicker he would be able to fight his way out of here.

But... where was his mecha? They could have stored it anywhere in this huge place! He'd have to find a way out if he were to get to it, without them noticing. Planting his chin in his hand, the young pilot began to plan an escape.

"This suit is extraordinary!" Ratchet marveled.

"What did you find out about it?" Arcee asked, finding herself curious.

"Well, it certainly isn't sentient." Ratchet grunted, examining a scan.

"So what does that mean?" Bulkhead put in, eyeing the mecha with mistrust. "He won't suddenly wake up and attack us will he?"

"No. It appears to be nothing more than a shell, a weapon."

"Then how does it strategize on the battlefield if it's a mindless drone?" Arcee persisted, wanting answers from the one who killed Cliff.

Ratchet hesitated. He wasn't sure if he should tell them just yet. They were all staring at him intensely though, blue optics boring into him. "I... I believe the child might have been controlling it."

"What?" Arcee moved over, moving her hand in a cutting gesture. "That's impossible. How could one human control something like this?"

"I know, but I can't find any other conclusion."

The bots shared looks that were deeply disturbed. Children were cherished in Cybertronian culture, so the idea of a child soldier...

"How old is the kid again?" Bulkhead asked, uncomfortable with the situation at hand.

"From the scans I performed, roughly sixteen human years." Ratchet replied grimly.

"That's... young, even for a human."

Ratchet nodded.

"It is."

The air became heavier with the new knowledge, when Optimus stepped into the room, looking just as grim as the rest of them. Safe to assume he failed to get the human to talk then.

"The boy seems to be doing better. However, he is refusing to speak."

"It seems likely that he was trained for a scenario like this, in case he was captured." Ratchet concluded.

"That's a bit much for a kid his age." Bulkhead said lowly.

"No kidding.." Arcee muttered.

"I need one of you to procure food for the boy." Optimus informed, shooting the two a look. "Be wary when going into the human populace and watch for their sensors."

Bee whirred and beeped excitedly, volunteering.

"Bumblebee, I don't want you taking any risks." Options said sternly.

The scout nodded quickly.

Bumblebee sped out of the room, leaving the remaining four Autobots behind. Bulkhead walked up slowly to where 'Bee had been standing.

"Er, how is he going to pay for that stuff?"

Jack had been greatly surprised when a yellow robot walked in with a tiny bag pinched between two large fingers, placing it down

carefully in front of him. The robot had lingered a few moments, catching a few sly looks before leaving. Jack sent the bag a wary look. It could be dangerous, explosive or-

Did he smell... chicken?

That had brought him food? Jack poked the bag then scurried away. Nothing happened, so Jack, feeling a bit braver, hesitantly peered into the bag.

There was a whole roasted chicken, bought from a grocery store deli probably, and a few bottles of soda. How did they even get this? That were huge! Was security really so lacking? Or had they maybe destroyed a whole town just to get this? He paled at the thought. He dearly hoped that wasn't the case.

Still... he was hungry...

He pulled out the warm plastic container, popping off the lid. Warily sniffing the food, Jack took a small bite from the chicken. For all intents and purposes, it was just plain old chicken, Jack was surprised to find.

No poison that he could discern, no strange taste. He wasn't getting sleepy either, so they hadn't drugged the food. He slowly began to eat more and more, happy to fill his belly,

This wasn't like anything he'd been trained for... Maybe it was a trick. To lure him into a false sense of security? Well it wouldn't work. Not now, not ever!

Still... no reason to let good food go to waste, right?

"How is the boy?" Ratchet asked as Optimus exited the humans room.

The prime grimaced.

"Still refusing to speak. But he at least ate."

"Some progress at least..."

"Indeed."

"Are you here to tend to the boys wounds?"

"Yes. With some luck, I can convince him to take some pain killers this time around."

Optimus nodded, moving along to the command room. Ratchet quietly entered the teen's room. As always, he found blue-grey eyes staring at him. "You look a little better now that you've had something to eat." Ratchet said lightly, hoping to initiate confession with the human.

Yet the boy still said nothing, watching him warily.

Ratchet sighed.

"Not one for conversation, are you?" The teens glowering intensified, staring bullets into Ratchet. But the medic remained unfazed, scanning the child and looking over the results. "Hm... Your immune systems seem to be suffering a bit. Could cause an infection if left untreated..."

Continuing to look over the scan, he added,

"I believe I have the correct medication that will give you a bit of a boost."

The teen jolted at that, backing up several feet.

"D-don't you dare touch me!"

Ratchet blinked.

"I was only going to-"

"Stay away!"

Ratchet frowned.

"I am not going to hurt you, I-"

"Get back!" The boy shouted furiously.

"Don't panic." Ratchet said, holding his hands out in front of him.

"Nothing is going to hurt you."

"Don't you dare touch me or I swear-!"

"I am only trying to help, your reaction is foolish!" Ratchet cut in sternly. The teen trembled from head to toe at the sight of the medic. Ratchet sighed, forcing himself to calm down. Being angry wouldn't help either of them, after all. "I am a medic, boy. I swore an oath to help those who are injured, not to make their suffering worse."

"Do you even know *anything* about human biology?" The boy sniped.

"I know enough."

Jack still cringed away when the medic reached out. This wasn't working... perhaps the boy would take better to his holoform. Jack face stay when a crackle of static, something forming at the mechs pedes Jack tensed, getting ready to fight or flee.

And then a man appeared before him with graying auburn hair, looking to be in his mid forties. Jack blinked, confused and startled all at once. What... how... was *this* how they'd managed to get him food?! By pretending to be human?! "Now if you'll relax and give me a moment of your time-" He was caught off guard when the holoform was attacked, a fist slugging into its face that caused the medic to yelp in surprise and the holoform to disappear. Jack glared up at the stunned medic, expression fierce.

"You won't win. Humans might be small but we're far from helpless!"

"Win? Win *what* ?" Ratchet asked, bewildered.

"The war!"

"I... wasn't aware that humans were concerned about our ongoing war with the Decepticons?"

Jack looked incredulous.

"Decepti- I meant us! Humans!"

Ratchet shook his head.

"I'm afraid you have been misinformed. We have no quarrel with humans." Ratchet told the youth calmly. "Our battle lies with Decepticons and Mechas."

Jack gaped for a minute, then,

"We *are* the mechas!"

Ratchet went still, shock crossing his face.

"I... had a suspicion after examining the body." Ratchet admitted despite the hollow feeling in his chest. "It has no central processing core of its own."

Jack scoffed.

"Yeah right. Admit it, you knew the whole time!"

"We did not-"

"Just go away! Leave me alone!"

Ratchet flinched away, as though he'd been struck. Hesitantly, the medic left. There was nothing he could do while the boy was so riled up. The human had finally talked, though it wasn't exactly what anyone wanted to hear.

Chapter 3

Will let out a yell of anger after his shot missed the tallest of the robots, opting instead to make a run for the portal. His hands caught only wisps of green and blue dissipating energy as the closing of the portal cut off any hope of rescuing Jack from his captors. He slammed into the crumbling wall that his blaster had destroyed.

"Frag it!" He snapped, angrily as he brought himself back to his feet, his mecha having little more than a scratch. "Not him! Bring him back!" Will shouted, pounding his fist into the wall of stone as any hope he had of rescuing Jack came crashing down like the stones at his feet.

This... this couldn't be happening. No, this wasn't happening!

"Iron Will to base!" Will shouted into the comm but all he received was static due to the mineral composition of the cave. H

"Son of a- Iron Will to base! Someone answer me!"

"Shit!" Will punched the wall again, immensely frustrated by how this simple recon mission had turned out. The longer he spent in this god forsaken cave the less likely it was to retrieve Jack!

"Lazarus Four, do you read me?!" Will tried again, hoping that his men could at least hear him. When no one answered he felt his heart sink. Will hurried to go find the others, inform them of the situation. He needed to get back up, he couldn't find Jack on his own, he needed help-

He whipped around just in time to see a metal fist flying at him. He just barely managed to duck, stumbling away from the blow directed at his chest.

Will strung his fist out, catching the alien robot in the head. A satisfying crunch resounded throughout the cave, its head curving inward from the blow. The body caused the ground to shake as it landed, Will kicking it away. A glance told him it was one of the more

common foot soldiers of the invaders. Silver and purple with a single thin visor and no real mouth to speak of- the weakest class that they knew of. With a sound of disgust, Will rushed onward through the way he came to regroup.

There was never *just one* though, Will thought anxiously. Wherever there was a grunt a dozen more were usually in proximity. Going inside the caverns had been a mistake- he and his men were at a disadvantage here, unable to communicate with each other. There was no telling how many of those things were down here. He needed to find his soldiers *now*.

He could already hear fighting. Metal clashing against metal, blaster shots and yelling...

"Hang on!" Will raced through the tunnels when he was slowed by the narrowing of the tunnel he was going down. Will forced himself through, breaking the sides when his shoulder smashed into the stone to widen the opening. Flashes of yellow and blue shined through the small opening, gunfire tearing chunks out of the walls. Grunt after grunt attacked the mecha pilots, most falling like gnats against their superior combat prowess.

That changed though when he saw a newcomer, vastly different from the common robots that littered the ground. From the limited amount of light that the energon crystals provided he could tell that he was taller than the common footsoldiers, slimmer, with impossibly thin arms.

Within seconds it was one of his men, Backburner, was being assaulted by said mech, his blows deflected by the mechs deceptively strong limbs. When he was knocked to the ground, a heavy foot pressing him down in place.

Will gritted his teeth inside his mecha, taking aim with his blaster the moment the soldier had fallen.

"Ugh!" He grunted when something struck him in the head, his body spinning from the force. Will managed to catch himself with a hand and knee before he crashed into the ground.

"Looks like this one has some fight in it, eh Knockout?" A voice rang out and Will could hear the smirk in it, even through the ringing in his head. He moved to push himself off the ground when something jabbed into his neck, followed by an intense shock that left him a twitching mess. His systems glitched, his connection to the Mecha fraying dangerously from shocks to Iron Wills neck.

Will held on through sheer force of will, struggling to regain control of his motor functions when he was picked up via the mechas head.

"Careful Breakdown. We still need him in one piece." Spoke another voice, this one higher in tone and irritatingly smug.

Will tried to hold on the his connection with his mecha. He had to get through this, had to find Jack!

The machine holding him up cried out in pain when Iron Wills elbow smashed into his face. A short drop later he rolled to avoid the shock prod the red one jabbed at his face, shooting the mech with a round from his shoulder mounted blaster.

"Ow! Frag it, son of a-"

"Don't underestimate us!" Will warned as his mech brought down more and more of the machines, the floor littered with purple and black bodies.

"Don't let him escape!" The mech with the putrid shouted while the other ones hand transformed into a giant hammer.

"We have your back sir!" A fellow mecha pilot exclaimed to Will as another was downed. The fight became even more chaotic, it was suddenly hard to tell up from down, friend from enemy. Steadily his men began to fall, one by one, as they were picked off by the newcomers. They were outnumbered, outgunned, *outmaneuvered*-

Will gave a cry of pain as another shock was delivered to his mecha.

Everything went black.

"Ahh!" Will screened as he joked back into consciousness, jerking at the cables attaching him to his mecha.

He smelled burnt metal, circuitry, and flesh, acutely aware of the burns seared into his flesh. Managing to pry his eyes open, Will looked around, confused and disorientated. He was still in the confines of his Mecha, and still attached by a few loose cables, but he couldn't feel the connection to his machine. No moment from the Mecha when he shifted his arms or legs. All the systems appeared offline...

"Scrap..." The man hissed. "Scrap!"

He couldn't see anything through the Mechas visor either, the inside conn-pod barely visible save for a sparkling cable that Will took care to avoid.. Will carefully disconnected himself from the Mecha, ignoring how his body ached in protest.

"Ugh..." He groaned in pain, hand going to the back of his neck. "Gonna make those bastards pay for this." He swore, balling up his fist in frustration.

But first... first he had to get out of here and find Jack.

Even in the near complete darkness he was able to find the exit to the conn-pod having piloted for over a decade. Unlike most Mechas his conn-pod was located at the shoulder, which would allow him a good view once he stepped out. He was carefully with his footing, knowing one slip up and he could break his neck if he rushed upward into unknown territory. Unlatching the hatch proved difficult with the limited amount of light but he managed, pushing it off with a shove and a grunt.

He was met with a dark room, with metal walls and floors.

"The hell...?" He said aloud, glancing about. Immediately he noticed his Mechas arms and legs were lowered and restrained. Not only that but a sheet of metal seemed to have been welded over the chest of his Iron Will. It didn't take long for it to click in his head- it was meant to keep him trapped inside the disabled Mecha.

The realization sent a spike of repulsion through Will. Why would the robots wish to trap them like that, if not to kill them?

It was fortunate for him that not every mecha was designed equally. Most had their conn-pods located in the chest or head, though the later was becoming less favorable as the head was a common target in battle. He'd never been so grateful that his own was in such an odd location.

This didn't make any sense though. Why hadn't he been killed right away?

Worst, he had been placed in what amounted to a metal box. A massive door large enough for mechs to come ago was the only entrance and exit. Likely protected by guards on the outside, slimming his chances of escape to zero without outside help. Will slipped back inside his Mecha, as there was precious little he could do on the outer shell.

First thing first; get the basic systems back up and running without raising the alarm. Will went to grab the emergency tools from storage, pulling out the night-vision goggles and an assortment of repair tools that they always kept inside in the cause of minor issues.

He wondered if these mechs had Jack somewhere. He assumed they did.

Jack...

Will paused, eyes lowering as he thought of his young friend. Now more than ever he regretted bringing Jack into this life where he had to fight for survival. Will settled on his haunches with a heavy sigh, rubbing a hand against his brow. Maybe this was punishment for bringing a child into war. Jack deserved better than to be a tool of the government. 'Sacrifices had to be made for the betterment of mankind', they had been told.

But Jack...

Jack had only been a child when he'd been brought in.

Will... he could remember it like yesterday.

Jasper was a speck of a town surrounded by a desert. Honestly he was surprised that this place even managed to make it on the map.

It was unusual to be sent to such a small town to search for future mecha pilot prospects. Vegas would have been a better choice in term of populations and increase their chances of finding a suitable candidate. They would be surveying the elementary school first, then middle and high school for anyone with potential. They'd be placed on a list as people of interest when they graduated, however far off that may have been. It wasn't his favorite part of the job but it was still his job.

So here he was now, standing in front of a bunch of gaping children, Epps at his side. His friend nudged him in the side, grinning at him.

"Wow!" Some children mouthed in amazement, eyes sparkling and glued to Ruhr symbol that marked him and Epps as a mecha pilot.

A small smile twitched at Will's lips, the admiration endearing.

"You're a real pilot?" A little girl with pigtails asked, bounding with energy.

"Sure are!" Epps said, grinning as he bent down, pointing at his badge. "See this? Means I'm a bonifide mecha pilot!"

Will sent his friend a dry look that clearly said 'don't brag'.

"Is there a mecha here? Can I see it?" Another boy asked quietly.

"No, not today, sorry kids." Will offered, smiling apologetically.

"Today we're here to give you all a special test."

Many little heads popped up.

"A test?"

"Like a math test?"

There was some groaning at the mention of math. Will laughed lightly.

"No, nothing like that."

"Well be testing to see if any of you might be able to pilot a mecha of your own one day." Epps put in, and the kids all but swarmed at their legs. "Whoa! One at a time!"

"Alright, alright!" He laughed. "Everyone sit down!"

"We can be pilots?" One child exclaimed in excitement, furthering the commotion in the room.

"We'll see, but first you all need to sit down! We can only test you all one at a time." Each student raced to their seats, starting up at them with impatient wonder. Will resisted the urge to sigh at the sight of such eager face.. This would be a long day. "Alright boys and girls, line up one at a time..."

There was pushing and shoving, some crying when one kid got pretty much run over, and yelling.

"Me! Me first, me first!"

Will raised a brow as a red-head shoved his way to the front.

"You'll all get a turn, so no cutting in line." The teacher said sternly to the class, telling the boy off.

"But I wanna go first!"

"Vincent-"

"I wanna go first!"

As the boy threw a tantrum, Will scooped up a little girl and plopped her down in the chair they had at the ready.

"Alright, you might feel a bit of a tingle." Will warned her. The chatter stilled as they watched the three prep a strange machine and placed something on her head. "Kind of like when you drag your feet on the

carpet and shock someone when you poke them, but in your head. There's nothing to be afraid of, alright?" She nodded nervously while the teacher ushered the other kids back, ignoring the whining red head.

Will moved to the nearby laptop and nodded to Epps.

"Go ahead."

Epps started it up, a slight hum coming from the device when the little girl winced slightly, looking uncomfortable. Will watched the statistics on screen before him. Nothing promising, he noted without surprise. It barely registered on the chart and there was no possibility of synchronization to be seen.

"Alright sweetie, you're done." Will said kindly, turning off the device and petting her head as he took off the miniature helmet.

"I did good?" She asked. Will nodded.

"Yes, you did *very* good."

She beamed at him, going by to her desk when the teacher prompted her to.

It went like that for the next hour, some kids well-behaved, others not so much. Some had the potential to be future pilots, given some training later in life, but those were far and few in between. It was turning out just as he had expected.

Worst of all, this red headed kid, a sure bully, refused to believe he had no potential.

"You need to go sit down kid." Epps warned him.

"There's something wrong with that dumb computer!"

"Vincent, one more outburst and you'll be sent to the principals office!" The teacher snapped irritably, fed up with his attitude. Will sighed. Kids like these... It made him wary of having kids of his own if they could turn up like this.

Will gave a start when a small hand tugged lightly on his pant leg. He looked down, surprised to find a little boy with big, dark blue eyes staring at him curiously.

"Mister, is it my turn? I wanna go back to drawing, but Miss Ellaina says I can't until I sit in the chair..."

"Yes, of course..." Will nodded, a bit surprised that the child wasn't as enthusiastic as the others had been.

He watched, somewhat amused as the boy tried to climb into the chair that was, admittedly, just a bit too tall for kids. The boy, short for his age, was struggling to climb up. With a chuckle, Will lifted him up and plopped him down in the seat, then went about connecting the small, sticky electrodes to the boy's head and placing the helmet on just so.

"Hold still." He told him as he popped the last one on, the boy squirming a tad.

"They *tickle* ." The boy retorted, huffing. "I can't help but move! I'm ticklish!"

Will smiled.

"Ah, I see."

The youth fell silent, waiting patiently for the 'test' to end.

"Bear with us a little longer, we're just now starting it up." Will chuckled at his impatience.

The machine whirred as it came to life, and Will watched, expecting to see the boy tense up...

But instead, the child relaxed, humming softly to himself and kicking his legs lightly as he sat in the chair, drumming his fingers along the armrest.

Will's brow furrowed with confusion, and he turned his gaze to the laptop when he felt his heart stop. When was the last time he'd seen such high statistics...? Never, he was sure of it.

"Ain't ever seen something like this before." Epps muttered as he looked at the results, then back at the kid. Jack was simply sitting there, completely passive with a small smile on his face. "You okay kid?"

The little boy nodded.

"Uh-huh. It feels nice!"

They paused at the child's unusual response.

"Not like something is pressing against your head?"

"I feel fuzzy!" The boy giggled, seeming delighted by the sensation.

"This is off the charts Will. You sure this isn't thing isn't malfunctioning?" Epps muttered quietly to his friend. He was a little concerned truth be told, since this was too good to be true.

Will hummed in agreement, nodding slightly.

Taking a moment, Will decided on a course of action. He didn't want to frighten the little boy by abruptly pulling him out of the chair and taking him to another room for further examination.

"I need to make a phone call." Will said, moving outside the room quickly.

Will had never expected for his superiors to bend the rules, to bring such a sweet, innocent kid into the life of a pilot so early on. Even with such talent they should have waited until Jack was older, like they had with the others.

Will sometimes wished he'd never met Jack. Maybe then, the kid would've had a normal life...

"Snap out of it will. This is no time to be reminiscing..." He berated himself, going back to his task. He'd get out of here, and then he'd find Jack, and together they would get the rest of the team and escape. With that goal in mind Will worked to set it in motion,

grabbing emergency tools to start the reparation. It didn't have to be perfect, but enough to be operational. Will started on the long, arduous task, unwilling to give up on Jack.

He'd already screwed up the boy's life enough as it was, he'd die before he made it worse.